

SUMMER VISITORS.

We—that is Mrs. Turtle dove and myself—had just come into possession of a small house out of town—a cottage, two stories in height and about twenty feet square, with a small cabbage garden in the rear and a grape vine and a cherry tree in the front yard. We had never owned any property before, and we couldn't help feeling a little proud of this, though, like Morleena Kenwigs, we had been taught that it was "sinful."

"Come down and pay us a visit," we had said to every one with whom we shook hands, as we bade farewell to the city. "Come down and see our little place in strawberry time." And every one had answered:

"We shall be delighted."

We had been very happy in our new home—which, by the way, I left at 6 o'clock in the morning and returned to at 8 o'clock at night, per steam train. To be sure, there were Sundays, you know. We were a little afraid of the low-lying ground about the frog pond, which our blue-looking neighbor, Mrs. Doldrum, informed us was "certain sure to fetch the ager some day," and did not like to confess to each other that quinine was the sample commodity of the place; but really, it was beautiful, frog pond and all. And now that strawberry time had come, and we felt sure we should have a large harvest—at least enough for tea three times—my wife said "we knew the joys that farmers feel."

Their woe, too, for a big worm had attacked our two cabbages, and something of a wilting nature was occurring to the early peas.

Our parlor, with its Indian matting and white curtains and spider-legged chairs, was a model of airy comfort. There were always flowers in glasses on the mantel, and there was a bird in a cage in the window. Peggy, the "girl," did the work, and my wife was always fresh and bright in her white muslin and and knots of ribbon and flowers. She was growing plump, too, and Mrs. Turtle dove looked well when she was plump. I was thinking of these things with satisfaction as I opened the gate of my garden one night and almost tumbled over Mrs. Turtle dove, who, with a glass dish in her hand, was bending over the strawberry bed.

"Oh, Timon!" she exclaimed, as I saluted her, "do help me, please. I'm trying to get enough ripe berries for tea. After bragging so, I don't want Miss Mittens to go back to the city and say she didn't have any. Miss Mittens came down by the noon train, dear."

"Did she?" said I. "Ah, well, pleased to see her, I'm sure."

"Yes, of course, Timon," said my wife very slowly. "And I hope there's milk enough. She says she's going to live on milk now she is in the country."

Now we did not keep a cow, and we had almost to go on our knees to Farmer Fish to induce him to spare us a quart a day. "He always liked to send full cans down by the train," he said, and he and Mrs. Fish never touched milk themselves. We had even suspected the good Fish of watering this quart of ours; perhaps, being a benevolent man, he thought it might be too rich for us. It is always right to think the very best of people, you know.

"I wish we had a cow," said I; "perhaps Peggy could milk her if—"

"Hallo, old fellow!" cried a voice behind me. "Been chasing you ever since you left the train. Any one would know you had a pretty wife at home by the way you walked. I've taken advantage of your charming invitation and run down to stop a while. How do you do, Mrs. Turtle dove? I can see that farm life agrees with you by your cheeks."

And we both shook hands with Mulligan. Fred Mulligan, whom I remembered with a sort of qualm, put up at the Fifth Avenue Hotel as a general thing and was one of the most particular men about "his eating."

But, at least I could make him welcome, so I ushered him into the house, spring overcoat, slender umbrella, Russian leather traveling bag and all, and leaving him in the parlor, went out into the kitchen to open the sardine box—Peggy had a way of making chowder of the sardines in the process—and to assure Mrs. Turtle dove that the small quantity of berries she had collected would be "plenty."

We were rather a merry party as we sat down to tea that night. Mr. Mulligan and Miss Mittens had discovered that they had met before at Saratoga, and were already very intimate.

They complimented in chorus.

"How delightful it is to be country people; isn't it?" said Mr. Mulligan.

"Indeed it is," said Miss Mittens. "Nature casting her most precious things at their feet as one may say—flowers and fruit and—and breezes you know. I fairly pine for the country, and I hate hotels and strange boarding houses; so, as I actually have

a sister in dear Mrs. Turtle dove, I thought I'd throw myself on her charity for the summer."

"Just as I felt," said Mulligan. "Said I: There is Turtle dove ready to welcome me with open arms. Why not go to him?"

"I am going to be rural while I am here," said Miss Mittens. "I don't mean to drink tea or coffee. I mean to live on milk and fruit here."

"And I," said Mulligan—"no champagne for me when I can have milk."

I felt very glad indeed to hear that he did not want champagne.

"But oh, my dear," sobbed Mrs. Turtle dove, a little while after the meal was over, catching me in a quiet corner, "to think of our first strawberries, and you not to have even one tiny tonty one. The one I tried to swallow choked me when I thought of that. And don't you think Mr. Fish would sell us more milk while they stay?"

I declared that I did not mind about the berries; that I would make Fish sell milk at any price. By the way, he did give in at last, and we gave him two shillings a quart. There was no competition in the neighborhood.

"And I'll bring berries down from town to-morrow," I said. "They are plentier than the are in the country."

"Miss Mittens has the spare room, and Mr. Mulligan will have the hall bedroom," said my wife. "He looks altogether too grand for it, but I can't help it."

Then we went back to entertain our guests, and we were really getting on finely—what with the piano and duets—when there came the sound of bumping and scraping at the carriage steps. A voice cried:

"Hallo, Turtle dove! Folks for you."

And out we rushed to find the garden full of the Rev. Mr. Calliope and his family—Mrs. Calliope, Miss Calliope and Master Calliope.

Mr. Calliope was our pastor, and we had given him a remarkably hearty invitation.

"As my congregation insisted on giving me a vacation," said Mr. Calliope, "we are come."

I saw they were, and I was wondering where they were to sleep that night, when Mrs. Calliope, who had been kissing my wife, remarked:

"But the other friend who came up with us—the very entertaining gentleman who—"

"Here he is!" shouted Mr. Fish from his wagon. "And if he thinks I'm going to ride him and his porker-manker from that there depot behind this here horse that has been plowing all day, for fifty cents, he thinks I'm greener than I be!"

"I make no objection—no objection," said a thin voice, "only I am unable just at this moment—I think I must have it in my watch pocket—can you lend me half a dollar, Mr. Turtle dove?"

I could—I did—and I took the long, fishy sort of hand that was offered to me the next moment, and welcomed Mr. Bangs, the amateur spiritual medium to my hearth and home.

"I was impressed to come," he whispered to me. "Something seemed to roll away, and I saw you among green fields and pleasant pastures and was drawn toward you by a subtle influence. I did not even wait for baggage. You understand?"

I had heard that day from a fellow-boarder of Mr. Bangs that his landlady had delicately mentioned to him that until he could pay his little bill she should "prefer his room to his company, and would retain his trunk," and quite understood. We got into the little parlor somehow, and we all sat down.

"And I'm sure you must be hungry," said I. "We've supplied, of course"—it was just 10 o'clock—"but you'll have a bite."

"Don't put yourself to any trouble," said Mr. Calliope. "My dear friends, I beg you don't put yourself to any trouble on our account. We want the fruits of the earth—no more. Give us some milk, a simple biscuit, and your delightful fresh butter and a bowl of strawberries, and we ask no more."

Here Mrs. Turtle dove gave an involuntary shriek. She had presence of mind enough to say she had seen a spider.

Poor Mr. Bangs only groaned softly to himself, but he looked as though the spirits who had been in the habit of drawing mysterious apples and oranges from his sleeves had not been able to find any there that day, or had carried them off afterward.

The Calliopes were probably disappointed as to the fruits of the earth; but they had an appetite for sardines, bread and butter, tea and canned pears. And Mr. Bangs seemed to enjoy himself mightily. We put the Rev. Mr. Calliope and wife into our own room. Miss Calliope shared Miss Mittens's apartment, and we induced Peggy to take a bolster on a lounge in the kitchen, while Mr. Bangs reposed in her accustomed bed. As for young Calliope, we took liberties with him on account of his youth, and put him on the parlor sofa. And we—oh! well,

it didn't matter for us. We went up into the loft—it was four feet high—and slept on the ragbag.

"And oh, Timon," said dear little Mrs. Turtle dove, "I've put on the last clean sheet, and how we are to change I don't know. I thought that six pairs of sheets enough for two to go to house-keeping with. And what a mercy it is all our friends gave us forks and spoons when we were married."

I was off early next day. I made the arrangements alluded to with the amiable and generous Mr. Fish for two gallons of milk a day, I contracted with the butcher for beef, and I brought strawberries and vegetables home in a basket.

My city guests supposed that all those strawberries grew in the garden, and that we kept a herd of cows. Berries were 25 cents a basket in the market, and they were not hulled. But the market man always threw a basket in on every two dozen. He always did, he said, when one bought for a hotel.

"At home, you know," said young Calliope, with the candor of youth, "in the city, you know, you can't have more'n a preserve dish of strawberries at a meal. They are so beastly dear; but here, where you get 'em for nothing you can get a bowlful."

Did I tell you that Peggy was gone? She was. She went the second morning. "And I'd like to know what you'd be marning by hiring me for two and giving me a dozen to work for?" she had said; "and thin doing nothing but ate all the day long, and me turned off on honest bed to slape on spikes, after puttin' in me hard day, and dish-up to wash till I do be going crazy."

I could not defend myself. I could only promise her a silk dress if she would stay her month out.

"I'd have nobody left to put it on, if I worked myself to death," said Peggy. "I'd rather have me flesh in the calico," and so she departed.

After that Mrs. Turtle dove lived in the kitchen. No one seemed to know it. None of the ladies ever made their beds, or filled their water pitchers, or offered any assistance.

I sat up all night to pare potatoes and turnips, lay the fire, and do all I could, and I became a beast of burden, as to baskets; but my business must be attended to. Poor little Mrs. Turtle dove grew thinner every day, whereas our guests plumped up beautifully.

Still, we were gaining the reputation of being very hospitable, and that was something. Our friends thought so much of us—that was more. But, alas! we soon found that they were not as well pleased with each other. It began with Mrs. Calliope wondering at the goings on of that Miss Mittens with Mr. Mulligan. Next Miss Mittens was astonished that Mrs. Calliope should fancy Mr. Mulligan could desire to be followed about by a chit like her. Then Mr. Calliope had an argument with Mr. Mulligan on religious subjects, and gravely inquired whether I did not think it wrong to have a free-thinker in my house. Then the argument waxed louder as Miss Mittens, who was High Church, contended with Mrs. Calliope, who was a Methodist.

Then young Calliope kissed Miss Mittens in the front garden, and Mr. Mulligan had words with him about it, and at last the unlucky Bang's familiar spirit hunted him up and began to run on the walls, tip the dining table, make him go off in a series of starts and cracks and jerks at inopportune times, and at last forced him to write a "communication," in which the spirit of Voltaire called Mr. Calliope a "misguided wanderer from truth."

That day, as I came home with the strawberries, I met Fish's wagon going down to the depot. It was full of Calliopes.

"Adieu, my friend," said Mr. Calliope. "We are going. We grieve to part, but we must go. Table-tipping and such abominations are too much for us."

"And that forward hussy!" said Mrs. Calliope. "Ah!"

"And that fellow with the mustache!" said young Calliope. "I say, Mr. Turtle dove, why don't you kick him out?" Miss Calliope only tossed her head.

A little further on I met a light wagon, in it sat Mr. Mulligan and Miss Mittens. "Good-bye old fellow," cried Mulligan. "I say, you've got in with a nice lot. It's only respect for your young wife that has kept me from trouncing them—some of 'em." Miss Mittens was in tears. Further on still I met Bangs on foot, who, as I learned on getting home, had left because Mrs. Turtle dove had protested against the heavy rappings on the kitchen ceiling.

"I have been impressed to leave you, my friends," he said, solemnly. "Farewell. Verily, scoffers shall have their reward." So our few friends were gone. They didn't go in peace, and that we regretted; but still they were gone, and life has its consolation.

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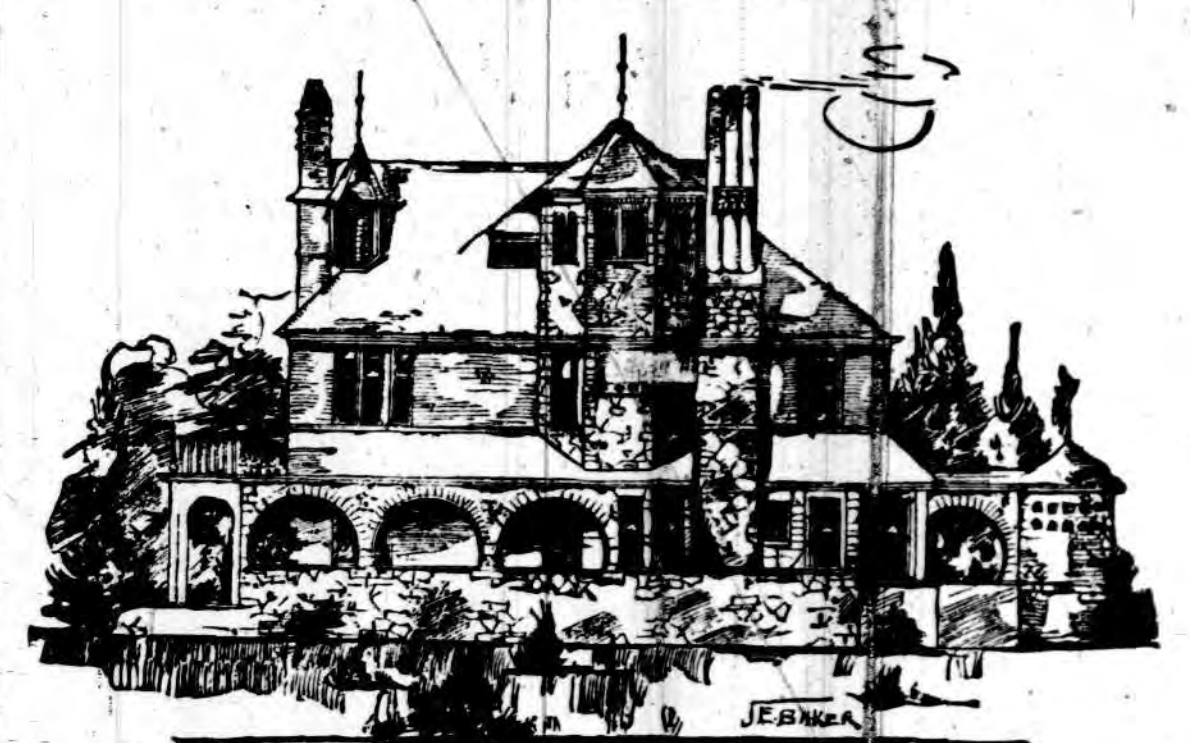
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